

3 Things You Can Do This Summer to Be a Better Teacher in the Fall

By Elizabeth Stein

As the school year winds down, effective teachers everywhere are reflecting on their experiences and translating them into a plan for another successful school year ahead. It doesn't matter what grade or subjects you teach, how long you've been teaching, or where—there are three universal things that all educators can do to be a better teacher in the fall.

1. Practice Mindfulness

The word *mindful* itself can create a nice sense of inner calm. When a person is mindful, he or she is present in the moment, fully aware, and accepting of his thoughts, surroundings, and situation as a part of the natural process of experiencing life.

Mindful people are observant and responsive—not reactive. Instead of judging people or situations, they accept them. This state of awareness holds special value for teachers. It keeps us taking care of ourselves despite our busy schedules and long list of responsibilities.

In addition, **mindfulness can make us better teachers**. Just think about the last time you experienced stress at any point—for any reason—in the midst of your school day. How did you handle it? Hopefully the results were positive. But if stress isn't handled well, it can adversely affect lessons, relationships, and even our personal energy level.

Mindfulness is a surefire way to become aware of our emotions but also to take charge and use them in ways that result in positive relationships with ourselves and our students, colleagues, parents, and family members.

Here are a few things you can do to learn more and begin applying mindful practices:

- Pick up ***Teach, Breathe, Learn*** by Meena Srinivasan and gain a personal perspective with ideas for practical applications to include mindfulness in daily practice.
- Check out an interview with Meena Srinivasan **at Edutopia**.

- Journal! Summer is a great time to start (or maybe just pick up where you left off). As you write down your reflections, you may find that organizing your writing will help you work toward a clear, organized mind. Also, consider the value in [making journaling a daily or weekly practice with your students](#). In addition to strengthening their writing or drawing skills, the outcome of expressing their thoughts and emotions will deepen their relationship to themselves as learners.
- Connect with nature. Make time for a walk or a visit to the park every so often. There's nothing like the great outdoors in summertime (bring your journal, too!).
- Practice [mindful techniques](#) that will become second nature by the time the new school year arrives. These techniques will help you keep yourself in check throughout all the inevitably wonderful and stressful moments.
- Incorporate [breathing techniques](#). Your thoughts, paired with mindful breathing, are effective focusing tools to ensure clear, responsive thinking that leads to successful actions.
- As you get into the swing of mindful breathing, [check out this article](#) and video demonstration to capture three breathing techniques that boost daily performance.

2. Read, Reflect, Plan

Kick back and read for a balance of personal and professional reasons. Some reading should be for pleasure. Other reading should have a direct impact on your professional goals for the upcoming year. Make sure to connect how these readings will apply to your vision.

- Map out your school year with a month-by-month instructional plan. Framing your monthly goals will help you to launch an organized year of learning and teaching.
- Identify the resources you will need and make a list so you can begin to gather what you need over the summer. Create your must-use website lists, books, articles, and visit your local teacher store to see what items might support your instructional plans.
- Create a strategy notebook that includes strategies you can turn to when you need to differentiate, scaffold, and guide students to personally connect to learning in meaningful ways. Gather strategies that you can apply for proactive lesson plans—and also those that you can use for spontaneous decisions during instruction. Check out [CAST](#) for ideas to meet the needs of all learners in your classroom.

3. Connect, Collaborate, Listen, and Share!

Effective teaching is a social, collaborative, teamwork-focused process. Summer is the perfect time to create or expand your professional learning network (PLN). Connecting with colleagues from your school, district, and community is powerful—but don't stop there! Here are some ideas to spark you into action:

- Join Twitter and participate in chats that spark your interest and expertise. There is a chat topic for everyone. And if you don't see a topic that you would like, create it! That's how **#coteachat** began. I wanted to connect with other co-teachers to discuss everything co-teaching—and voila! #coteachat was launched. Twitter is a year-round, any day, any time form of professional development—it's ready whenever you are!
- Create or participate in a book club that can provide you with a balance of professional and personal genres and topics.
- Learn two new technology-based tools you can apply next year. Check out **Education World** for some ideas or **Teach Thought** for more tech applications and setting your tech goals now.
- Connect with family, friends, and yourself—make time to just *be*!

The journey of becoming a better version of our teacher self is all about finding balance, joy, and opportunities to learn and collaborate. It's an ongoing process that creates a spirited commitment that will no doubt guide our students to deepen their own relationship to learning—and isn't that what it's all about?

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